

Falling Ashes and Never-Ending Seconds

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Falling Ashes and Never-Ending Seconds

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Summary

It was like a paper being set on fire, it started slowly: just a couple of kisses in the back of that room, New Year's kisses between friends that were all a joke. Then, it happened again in the uber... this time they hid behind the false claim that it was a small experiment and that they'd stop it when they got to the hotel. They didn't.

The catalyst, the moment everything was pushed over the edge, was when Dream leant close to George's ear, so close that he could feel the warm breath, and asked if he would like to stay the night. Then as the flame grew hotter the paper went with it, and a small session of kissing moved from the couch by the window, to against the wall, and to the bed. Suddenly it wasn't just kissing anymore.

George wakes up on New Years Day in his best friend's bed and realizes he has just made the worst mistake of his life.

Time is fluid.

Sometimes minutes can feel like hours, and sometimes hours can feel like only seconds have gone by. Like when you're waiting for a movie to play in the theatre and the fifteen minutes before it

starts to drag on as you try to save your popcorn. Or, like when you're at a party having the best night of your life one minute and the next you're at home with a hangover and hiding away from the stinging daylight that peaks through the curtains.

For George, the last night went by in a blur.

He remembered going to the party, though at that point he hadn't had anything to drink yet. Karl drove, volunteering to be the designated driver because he didn't trust the ubers in the new city, especially not on the holiday. They were in Las Vegas to celebrate the new year. It was the first New Years since COVID, the first holiday that all five feral boys were together for, and they were determined to make the most of it.

He remembered the pronounced, foul smell of the rental car, a direct result of the five air fresheners hanging from the rear-view mirror. Every single one was labelled with "new car", a smell that made George want to vomit out of the windows.

Despite the horrid car smell, the trip itself had been wonderful. They stayed in a huge five-star rated hotel, one of the most expensive in the city, which seemed ridiculous at first, but once George entered the main lobby he had realized why: everything was bordered with gold, from the fronts of the marble stairs to the edges of the large ceiling fans that hung over the beds in the room.

Dream was the one who picked it out, of course. He didn't spoil himself often, but they all had money to spend and it was a special occasion, so he caved. George, however, wasn't a huge fan. He would have much rather stayed in an Airbnb. There, he could break a lamp and only have to worry about a fifty-dollar replacement fee. Not that he was going to break a lamp, but it was more so the fact that he didn't have to have the constant worry in the back of his mind. In the hotel, everything felt delicate.

The destination of the car ride was someone's party. It was a mystery how they even got invited, but Karl knew a lot of people. The car was cramped. Dream, Quackity and George had to squeeze into the back while Sapnap got shotgun - perks of being Karl's favourite.

After Sapnap found how to connect his phone to the car's stereo system, the car got loud. There were a lot of things that would happen that George wouldn't be able to recall. Unfortunately, hearing Dream and Sapnap recite Let It Go purposely out of key, was still fresh in the back of his mind. They had both pre-gamed, shotgunning some vodka mix, despite George arguing against it. He didn't quite see the point. Maybe he had a stick up his ass, but there was a feeling in the bottom of his stomach, a pit of worry. Maybe it was a common side-effect of the anxiety caused by being in a new city, but he had a feeling that something was going to go wrong that night.

He remembered some random guy greeting them at the front door, already drunk and covered in glitter. His face was familiar, but George couldn't place it. Six steps inside the door all of the boys were offered shots of a weird blue Tequila type, compliments of the host. George took two. Then he was offered again when he entered the next room, and, because of Quackity's pestering, he took two more. That was when it started to go fuzzy, and time started to speed up, memories started to fall away.

He remembers getting a little too drunk, flirting with a blond- flirting with *Dream*. It wasn't the same as it usually was, which was whittled down to small remarks while in call on discord. In person, it was much different. They took every excuse to touch each other, rather it was a hand on the shoulder or wrist or their shoulders leaning together, there were barely any moments that they spent apart.

They played a few games of beer pong, and George lost both times because Dream was distracting

him and whispering things in his ear that he didn't remember anymore. They also, at some point, played pool on a team against Karl and Alex, and George was absolutely terrible. So, Dream helped him.

He can remember the warmth of his friend's breath against his neck as he leant against George's back, guiding his hands to the right positions of the cue and letting them linger there. Ahead of them was the white ball, perfectly aligned to hit the six into the left corner pocket. The points where their hands touched burned, and each time their skin grazed it felt like electricity shooting through them. George loved it, melting into the touching and leaning back to try and prolong the contact.

When George sunk his first ball, still with Dream's hands laced over his, they jumped up together and hugged as if they had just gotten the greatest news of their lives - and they collided with enough force that it sent them flying to the floor, George falling on top of Dream like all those cheesy romance movies. They didn't kiss then, but George can remember memorizing every single detail of Dream's lips and the overbearing temptation to lean down and feel them on his own.

It gets blurry after that. George isn't sure if they won or lost that game of pool or if they simply got bored of it in the middle.

A brief memory of counting down to midnight passes through his mind. He wasn't in the middle of the party, he was outside in the calm of the night, sitting on the back porch of the house, holding a bottle of Mike's hard lemonade and pretending that the tips of his fingers hadn't gone numb from the cold air.

It was a clear night, but because of the city lights, there was no use looking for stars. Instead, his focus was on Dream.

"It looks like we have ten minutes," the blond said, tilting his phone to George so he could see the world clock ticking down. George didn't know how long they were sitting there, or how they got there in the first place. At this point, he didn't know how many shots he'd had - but it was way more than four, way too many.

"I don't have a midnight kiss..." George pouted, pretending to be sad at that fact. He leant his head on Dream's shoulder, tilting slowly so he could feel the warmth from his neck. Lights of fireworks flickered in the distance, outlining the houses and coating the horizon with flashes of deep blues and yellows, and probably other colours that he couldn't see.

Dream rested his head on the top of George's, chuckling slightly, "I don't have a midnight kiss either"

Things got blurry again.

There was a conversation, words were thrown around, but he couldn't grasp any of them. It's frustrating because he can almost recall what was said as if it was on the tip of his tongue, but he can never quite reach it. It was one of the missing puzzle pieces, crucial for figuring out just how the events of later that night came to be. He would give anything to know what was said.

In a flash, he recalls counting down from ten, and this time they're back inside somewhere in a corner of a room full of people, though no one pays attention to them. They're all focused on their phones, set to the countdown. Dream and George are the only ones who aren't; they are only focused on each other. This time they're close, closer than when they played pool, closer than they'd ever really been. And when the clock struck zero, his lips were on the blond's.

Then there's a long period of time where he can't recall anything that happened. It was shortly after midnight, and twenty minutes after he reached his limit on tequila shots.

Then, he was kissing Dream hungrily in the back of an uber, and then he remembers Dream unlocking the door to his hotel room, their lips still laced together, and pushing George inside. The alarm clock next to the bed read 2:20 AM. George remembers letting Dream take control- *wanting* Dream to take control, pulling him on top, and how good it felt to kiss him. It was as if fate had brought them together, their entire lives building up for that moment, and George wasn't going to waste it.

Memories of that part still come back in flashes.

George thinks he's pieced together what happened, or at least, all that he possibly can.

It was like a paper being set on fire, it started slowly: just a couple of kisses in the back of that room, new years kisses between friends that were all a joke. Then, it happened again in the uber... this time they hid behind the false claim that it was a small experiment and that they'd stop it when they got to the hotel. They didn't.

The catalyst, the moment everything was pushed over the edge, was when Dream leant close to George's ear, so close that he could feel the warm breath, and asked if he would like to stay the night. Then as the flame grew hotter the paper went with it, and a small session of kissing moved from the couch by the window, to against the wall, and to the bed. Suddenly it wasn't just kissing anymore.

George wishes that he could say the night moved quickly, use it as an excuse to hide the mistakes, but it was pointless. He couldn't deny that they both wanted it as if their lives depended on it. They had time to grab the bucket of water and to extinguish the fire. They had so many chances, so many outs. But they didn't take them. George didn't want to stop it.

They lit a match and set their entire friendship on fire, and it felt so damn good to watch it burn.

However, now it was nine forty-five in the morning on New Year's Day. Time had stopped, the fire had died out, and George was burdened with the realization that he had just made the worst mistake of his life.

He was laying in the ashy remnants, so still that he was afraid the world would crumble around him as he moved. Even when the beams of golden sunlight shun through the curtains, he didn't move his arm to shield them away. The back of his head was pounding and he felt nauseous but that wasn't because of the hangover. His eyes were locked on the ceiling fan, following the blades as they turned slowly and steadily.

The calm breathing behind him was interrupted, and then he started to stir.

George held his breath.

The ceiling fan above him slowed, and for a few moments, it was completely frozen in time.

George shut his eyes and tried so hard to stay still, to prolong the moments before the weight of everything crumbled onto him, and the moments before the friendship - the greatest friendship in his life - would meet its end.

The overwhelming silence only made George's thoughts louder. He had spent so much time piecing together how they got there, how a simple, joking, New Years kiss led them here. One question bounced through his head: *What happens now?*

They had always been George and Dream. They were a friendship that survived despite them being an ocean apart, despite not meeting, or even knowing what the other looked like for years. A friendship built on late-night texts and discord calls, and phone calls that bypassed the Do Not Disturb feature. They should never have met in the first place, and still, they found a way to each other. George and Dream, some weird force of the universe, some unbreakable bond.

Would it be so unbreakable now?

Or would this be how they end?

When he opened his eyes, the ceiling fan was moving in circles again, steadily.

"Oh fuck, my head" Dream groaned, turning over and putting a hand over his eyes.

George could feel his heartbeat quicken. He forced himself to turn his head, to look his friend in the eyes, but the urge to turn the other way was unbearably strong.

Dream rubbed his eyes lazily, muttering small words to himself about being hungover and tired, so quietly that George could barely hear him.

Then Dream lowered his hand, and their eyes met, and they both froze.

For the first time in years, George couldn't tell what Dream was thinking. His green eyes were dark, but they weren't confused, nor were they angry, nor were they happy. His entire expression was blank.

George cursed himself, his eyes flickering down to the white bedsheets.

He should've got up and gotten out.

He could've - he had the opportunity and yet he made the stupid choice to stay. He woke up fifteen minutes ago, he could have snuck out and made it back to his own room in time. Dream probably didn't remember! Hell, George didn't even remember most of it, and he could have kept it his own little secret.

But there was some part of him that kept him there, still, and now he was paying for it.

George's eyes flickered to the other side of the room, looking past Dream and at the white wall. A brief memory flashes of his own back pushed roughly against the wall and the rough kisses pressed to his neck and collarbone. He blinked, shaking it away quickly.

"George..." Dream started, but then he trailed off. He shifted on his arms, trying to get in line with George's eyes but every time he got close George moved away. He eventually gave up, looking down at the bed, and along the sheets. George pulled the blankets closer to his neck, feeling exposed, vulnerable.

"I-" George tried to form a sentence but no words came out.

What do you say when your entire world is flipped upside down? How do you look your best friend in the eye when all you can think about is them fucking you?

"We need to talk." Dream said slowly and with hesitation clear in his voice. He sat up on the bed, leaning his back on the headboard. George closed his eyes, tilting his head down as if it could offer more protection as if it could hide him away, and he waited for the yelling to start.

But it never did.

Instead, Dream reached forward and his fingertips slowly touched the underside of George's chin, carefully tilting his head up. George still refused to open his eyes. He didn't need to, he could feel that Dream was looking at him, the gaze burned.

"What the hell happened last night?"

George almost snorted because it was a stupid question, but he stopped himself. The two of them were laying together in bed, hungover, naked. It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure it out. He opened his eyes, moving away from Dream's hand and giving himself more space. Dream's eyes flashed with a hint of hurt, but he retreated away to his side of the bed and George was thankful for that.

"We had sex." George eventually said, carefully and with clear hesitation in his voice. The words felt foreign on his tongue.

The room felt delicate, and the tension between them felt like glass. One wrong move and everything would shatter into pieces.

"We had sex." Dream repeated.

Then he laughed.

Dream laughed.

It's as if it's just a regular day like they were in a discord call playing Minecraft. It's the same stupid tea-kettle wheeze that always followed the moments after George did something stupid in a video game.

"Why are you laughing?" George asked, pulling the covers over himself more as a subconscious defence mechanism. He felt exposed, like Dream was laughing at him.

"Because we had sex!" Dream sputtered out.

"Stop saying that!" George shouted. His cheeks started to warm, and he already knew he was bright red.

The sudden shout made Dream's laughter die down immediately, and his lips fell into a straight line. The room was silent, so quiet that George could hear the ticking of the alarm clock and the blades of the ceiling fan.

The reality of the situation started to sink in, and Dream looked conflicted. He wasn't mad like George had suspected, he wasn't terrified like George was... but he wasn't happy or excited either.

George hated it. It was like a glass barrier had formed between them, separating them, and it felt so alien. George had always been able to read Dream, to know how he was feeling. It didn't matter that they were thousands of miles away and the only indication was the hint of change in Dream's voice; George always knew something was wrong. Now, he was sat in front of him, out in the open and George didn't have a clue. It seemed the fire had taken much more with it than George had anticipated.

"What happens now?" Dream asked, his voice breaking through the silence. He was trying so hard to hold back his emotions, and rather he was angry or happy it didn't show, and it killed George.

“I don’t know,” George answered truthfully.

“I have to ask George...” Dream started, his voice unsure and quiet, a sharp contrast to his usual tone, the tone George was used to. It was another harsh reminder of how serious the situation had gotten. He looked around the room, trying to collect his words and his eyes froze on the same spot of the wall that George had before. George tried to study his expression, wishing, hoping for any reaction. Dream didn’t move a muscle, and George felt like a knife had been stabbed through his heart.

It felt like years had gone by before Dream asked his question, “Did this mean anything to you?”

George opened his mouth, ready to come up with an excuse, with a way to brush it off and find a way to salvage what was left of their friendship, if it was even possible. He would do anything to go back to normal. Then he pressed his lips together harshly, forcing himself to stay quiet. Denying it seemed almost useless. They had slept together, there was no normal anymore, just shattered fractions of what they used to be.

When he looked at Dream, he didn’t see his best friend anymore. He saw someone who meant much, much *more* than that. When he looked at Dream all he could feel was a pull, an urge to step forward and connect their lips together. Perhaps it was then when he realized that it wasn’t a new feeling either, that he had been in love with Dream for so long it became as normal as breathing.

Perhaps the fire hadn’t started that night after all. Maybe it had been burning for a long time. George didn’t know when it had started, but he knew that there was no going back, and there was no way he could ever salvage their friendship but that didn’t have to be a bad thing.

When a house burns down, it gets rebuilt better and stronger, but before that can happen everything that’s left needs to be destroyed to make room.

“Yes,”

The word escaped George’s lips before he could stop them, crashing like a sledgehammer into a broken wall. It was one simple, tiny word, and it disintegrated the tiny fragments of friendship left between them.

The atmosphere thickened, and it got harder to breathe. The only things George could feel were his heartbeat and the tips of his nails being dug into the palm of his hand. Yet, he forced himself to keep talking, to confess, “I don’t think last night was an accident.”

Dream nodded, but he didn’t say anything. George tried to deduce the thoughts behind his eyes, but the silence was overbearingly loud. The clicks from the clock in the background started to get louder, taunting him. Tick, tick, tick.

George had never depended on Dream like this before, he had never waited with as much anticipation for an answer as he was now. Now, it was up to Dream. George had knocked the last walls down, and Dream got to decide if they would rebuild or if their friendship would be left as only ashes and dust.

The clock ticked over and over, until it was the only thing George could hear, and George wouldn’t take it any longer.

“What does this mean to you?” he finally asked.

Time is fluid. Seconds can feel like hours and hours can feel like seconds. The second that seemed to last forever, for George, was the second when Dream looked up from his hands and into his

eyes. It's the second of silence, dead silence between the two ticks of the second hand. It's the second where Dream opens his mouth and no words escape, where George waits for everything, for their entire friendship, to end.

It's the second before Dream says, "I think I'm in love with you."

The clock started to tick again, smoothly returning to its quick rhythm and fading into the background. George let the air out of his lungs, the breath that he didn't even realize he was holding, and the pressure of his nails on his palm released only to leave small indents. It was a feeling of relief like all the smoke and ash had finally disappeared and everything was clear once more.

"You love me?" George asked, and he couldn't help his voice breaking a little as he did.

Dream nodded, his lips curving into a smile and his eyes glistening, "I've been in love with you for so long." he breathed.

George isn't exactly sure how it happens, or even who initiates it, but before he can even realize it, their lips are pressed together and he's falling backwards onto the mattress. It takes him by surprise, but he quickly melts into the kiss as if it was natural instinct. Dream's hands rest hesitantly on George's jaw, holding him close, and George wraps his arms around Dream's neck.

Dream pulled away quickly after, however, "I- I'm sorry. Are you... are you okay if I-" he stuttered out, embarrassed, but George cut him off by leaning up and connecting their lips again.

It was much different than the night before, those kisses were filled with desperation and passion as if it was their only chance to ever kiss each other. Now, it was slow, intimate, and they savoured every single moment of it but they didn't rush because they had the comfort of knowing that it wouldn't be their last kiss. It wasn't their first either, that had happened when the clock struck twelve. But this kiss was the first one that truly *mattered*.

When they pulled away, they were both out of breath and smiling like idiots. Dream looked at George with eyes full of admiration, as if George was the only thing in the world that mattered, and George knew that he was looking back at him with the same amount of love. If he had known that this was the consequence, George would have poured gasoline over the fire a long time ago.

"I can't believe it took us this long." Dream muttered. He flopped down on his back, training his eyes up at the ceiling, and George did the same.

George couldn't help but focus on the fan, watching as the blades moved around and around in a steady rhythm; never speeding up or slowing down. It was comforting, a confirmation that told him that everything was finally as it should be, and George and Dream were right where they were meant to be.

"It's a messy story," George remarked.

"When have we ever done things the traditional way?"

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